

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEHRAN 03039 300428Z
ACTION HA-05

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEHRAN 3039

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM IR
SUBJ: PRISON HUNGER STRIKE IN IRAN

REF: A. TEHRAN 2926, B. STATE 77977, C. TEHRAN 2995

1. REF A WHICH CROSSED WITH REF B GIVES EMB INITIAL
RUNDOWN ON "HUNGER STRIKE" WHICH IS SUPPOSEDLY OCCURRING AT
QASR PRISON.

2. EMBOFF HAD ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION OF SUBJECT WITH FOREIGN
JOURNALIST EYEWITNESS MENTIONED REF A AND WITH SECOND SOURCE
WHO FAMILIAR WITH UNION OF NATIONAL FRONT (UNF) VIEWS. APPEARS
TALE GIVEN NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (REF B) IS GROSSLY
OVERDONE (THIS IS NOT UNUSUAL WITH UNF STORIES THAT HAVE
TRAVELED ACROSS ATLANTIC IN PAST). IN FIRST PLACE, AS WE
UNDERSTAND IT, STRIKE IS LIMITED TO "A FEW" (SOURCE SAYS
PROBABLY LESS THAN 20) PRISONERS IN ONE SECTION OF PRISON.
THERE HAS APPARENTLY BEEN NO RPT NO ATTEMPT TO USE FORCE ON
EITHER STRIKERS OR "RELATIVES" WHO HAVE GATHERED OUTSIDE PRISON.

IN FACT, FOREIGN JOURNALIST EYEWITNESS SAYS DEMONSTRATIONS
MARCH 19 AND 20 WERE REMARKABLY PEACEFUL, UNDER WATCHFUL
EYE OF RIOT POLICE, BACKED UP BY SMALL ARMY DETACHMENT.
ALTHOUGH WE HAVE HEARD NOTHING ABOUT PRISONERS DEMANDING
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PAGE 02 TEHRAN 03039 300428Z

"FAIR PUBLIC TRIALS", THIS MAY SIMPLY BE OVERSIGHT ON PART
OF COMMITTEE FOR DEFENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREEDOM, WHICH
HAS YET TO PUT OUT LOCAL BROADSIDE ON SUBJECT: PRISONERS
HAD TRIALS WHICH WERE LEGAL UNDER LAW IN EFFECT AT TIME
OF THEIR INCARCERATION AND ARE UNDOUBTEDLY USING CALL FOR
PUBLIC TRIAL AS POLITICAL PLOY TO GAIN RELEASE.

3. FOREIGN JOURNALIST SOURCE GAVE FOLLOWING ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND OBTAINED FROM TALKING WITH "RELATIVES" OF PRISONERS WHO DEMONSTRATED AT QASR PRISON: FOR THREE WEEK PERIOD BEFORE MARCH 12, MANY PRISONERS HAD REFUSED TO SEE THEIR FAMILIES AS GESTURE OF PROTEST AT BEING KEPT INSIDE. HUNGER STRIKE WAS LATER DEVELOPMENT. PRISONERS' EFFORT WAS INSPIRED BY UNF'S COMMITTEE FOR DEFENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREEDOM AS EFFORT TO PRESSURE GOVT TO RELEASE SOME OF "THEIR" PRISONERS AT IRANIAN NEW YEAR'S AMNESTY. SOURCE DID NOT KNOW WHETHER EFFORT DEEMED SUCCESSFUL OR NOT, BUT THOUGHT "SOME" HAD BEEN RELEASED". WHILE OTHERS REMAINED IN JAIL.

4. EMB COMMENT: WHILE US CONSUL WHO VISITED ANOTHER SECTION OF QASR PRISON SAW AND HEARD NOTHING (REF B), HIS REPORT THAT PRISON OFFICIALS SEEM RELAXED (AND NOT APPARENTLY ON VERGE OF USING FORCE TO BREAK STRIKE) IS CONFIRMED BY TWO SOURCES WHO WERE PRESENT OUTSIDE PRISON AT VARIOUS TIMES WEEK OF MARCH 19-26. FURTHER AMB SPOKE TO SHAH ABOUT THIS AND WAS ASSURED THAT GOI WAS NOT GOING TO GET ROUGH WITH THEM (REF C). EMB WILL CONTINUE TO MONITOR MATTER.

5. COMMENT: WE ARE AGAIN STRUCK BY EFFEE WAY IRANIAN DISSIDENT ORGANIZATIONS HAVE CAPTURED ATTENTION OF GROUPS SUCH AS NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, WHO MAY BE UNAWARE
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PAGE 03 TEHRAN 03039 300428Z

THAT THEY ARE SPECIFIC TARGETS FOR "CAMPAIGNS" WHICH OFTEN HAVE ONLY LOOSE RELATION TO FACTS. WE ASSUME NATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHURCHES AND OTHER GROUPS WHICH HOPE TO BE EFFECTIVE IN ADVANCING CAUSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS WOULD WISH TO AVOID THE APPEARANCE OF BEING THE CAPTIVE MOUTH-PIECE OF CLEARLY PARTISAN QUASI-POLITICAL ORGANIZATION OR INDIVIDUALS WE ARE PLEASE, THEREFORE, THAT COUNCIL HAS TAKEN THE INITIATIVE IN SEEKING TO CLARIFY FACTS THROUGH DEPT RATHER THAN UNCRITICALLY ACCEPTING STORIES SUCH AS CONTAINED REF A.
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